**Respect missing in action**

*05 Mar 2014 — Bucks County Courier Times*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

By Phil Gianficaro

News columnist

Army Pfc. Tariqka Sheffey must be shown the door. Or the gate. Whichever comes first. Escorted out of the Army, if not firmly pushed or shoved. Better yet, burly patriots grabbing each arm and launching her into star-spangled space would work just fine. Show her the meaning of Army Strong.

When one chooses to wear the uniform of a branch of the U.S. armed forces, as is the case today with an all-volunteer military, that decision comes with an expectation by America: honor it; don't embarrass it. Too many have sacrificed, and too much blood and tears have been shed, to disrespect.

But none of that matters to Sheffey, who has become a national disgrace. She has come under fire in the media and by veterans' organizations for her blatant and insulting disrespect for the American flag. This sorry excuse for a soldier posted a selfie on a social media site Tuesday showing her crouching in her car in full uniform to avoid having to salute the flag at Fort Carson, Colo., where she is stationed. The description under the photo on Instagram read:

"This is me lying back in my car hiding so I don't have to salute the 1700 flag. KEEP ALL YOUR "DAT SO DISRESPECTFUL/HOW RUDE/ETC." COMMENTS TO YOURSELF. cuz, right now, IDGAFFFF."

The IDGAFFFF translates to: I Don't Give A a and, well, you can guess what the 'Fs' represent.

Sheffey included in her text an icon of a hand showing its palm to the reader, as in, "I'm not listening to you; you listen to me." To paraphrase Dean Wormer's advice to flunking-out Flounder in "Animal House": Self-absorbed, disrespectful and stupid is no way to go through life, m'am.

"I get the feeling it's not as important to be a patriot as it used to be," said Richard Scott, of Buckingham, a retired Marine Corps corporal and commander of Post 175 of the VFW in Doylestown. "But her obligation is to adhere to military regulations. If you're not prepared to do that, perhaps she shouldn't have joined the military. But she said she would when she signed up.

"Some would say she has a right to her opinion, but you give up that right when you join. One of the things they tell you to do is, if the flag passes by or is raised or lowered, you stop what you're doing and render a salute. This woman obviously doesn't feel the rules apply to her."

Scott, who wore his uniform proudly and feels a shiver of pride whenever the colors are presented, believes military life isn't for Sheffey.

"Maybe she doesn't belong there," he said. "But then, why did she enlist? You know the rules when you enlist. I think her superiors have a good case for disciplinary action, if not dismissal. That she's raised this to a national discourse, I'm sure they'll push harder for dismissal."

When Sheffey's post made it to Facebook, a firestorm ensued. The Army is investigating the issue. Some Gold Star family members were outraged, as were veterans who felt offended. Sheffey responded with a video on Instagram this week expressing regret, but stopped short of apologizing for her actions.

"I seriously just want to say thank you to everybody who stood up to me today," she wrote. "That (expletive), to me, was not that serious. I am not a disrespectful soldier, and I really appreciate you all."

She's about to find out how serious it is to the rest of us, those of us who see the flag and stand, not crouch in the back seat of a car like a teen cheating with her boyfriend's best friend. Her distaste for the flag makes you wonder where she'll be crouching when her comrades need her and the bullets start to fly.

"This is very disrespectful," said Jim McComb, of Plumstead Township, a retired Marine Corps sergeant and member of Vietnam Veterans of America, VFW Post 175, American Legion and the Marine Corps League. "I have a problem with her not saluting the flag.

"It also reflects not only on herself, but her unit and the Army. She shows disrespect to me and every other member of the military. It infuriates me as a veteran."

But unlike Scott and me, McComb doesn't believe Sheffey should be discharged from the Army.

"She should be disciplined, not thrown out," he said.

McComb is more understanding than I. One Facebook poster expressed the feelings of many by remarking, "If they won't salute it, they damn sure won't fight for it."

Sheffey's social media post is the latest of a series of disrespectful acts toward the flag and the military by service members. Several National Guard members have been suspended from funeral honors detail in light of a photo showing them comically posing around a flag-draped casket during training. An investigation is ongoing. Air Force Staff Sgt. Cherish Byers is also the subject of an investigation after a three-year-old photo of her tongue-kissing a Prisoner of War-Missing in Action symbol went viral.

Respect is missing in action.

Every year, Jim McComb, Semper fi to the core, visits Tohickon Middle School to talk about Veterans Day. He said he's often asked by the kids how they can be patriotic. He tells them to fly the flag in front of their homes, and to stand when they see a flag pass during a parade.

"I tell them it isn't hard to act patriotic," he said.

For some, it's impossible.